

Sporotrichosis

What is sporotrichosis?

Sporotrichosis is a fungal infection, usually of the skin, caused by a microscopic fungus called *Sporothrix schenckii*.

Who gets sporotrichosis?

Anyone can get the disease but people handling thorny plants, sphagnum moss or baled hay contaminated with this particular fungus are at increased risk. Outbreaks have occurred among nursery workers handling sphagnum moss, rose gardeners, children playing on baled hay and greenhouse workers handling barberry thorns contaminated by the fungus.

How is the fungus spread?

The fungus enters the skin through small cuts or pricks from pine needles, thorns or barbs. Fortunately, it is not spread from person to person.

What are the symptoms of sporotrichosis?

The first symptom is a small pink, red or purple painless bump resembling an insect bite. The bump, or lesion, usually appears on the finger, hand or arm where the fungus first entered through a break in the skin. This is followed by the appearance of one or more additional raised bumps or nodules which open and may resemble a boil. Eventually, the skin lesions look like ulcers and are very slow to heal.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The skin lesions may appear one to 12 weeks after exposure but usually within three weeks.

How is sporotrichosis diagnosed?

Sporotrichosis can be confirmed when a doctor obtains a swab of a freshly opened skin nodule and submits it to a laboratory for fungal culture. The diagnosis can also be verified by a blood or biopsy specimen. It is important for the diagnosis to be confirmed by a doctor so that proper treatment can be provided. As a free service, the New York State Department of Health's Wadsworth Center for Laboratories and Research is available to conduct diagnostic and confirmatory laboratory testing.

What is the treatment for sporotrichosis?

Sporotrichosis is generally treated with iodides taken orally in droplet form, which must be prescribed by a doctor. Treatment is often extended over a number of weeks.

What are the complications associated with sporotrichosis?

The vast majority of the infections are limited to the skin. Cases of joint, lung and central nervous system infection have occurred but are very rare and usually occur only in people with diabetes or other disorders of the immune system.

How can sporotrichosis be prevented?

Control measures include wearing gloves and long sleeves when handling pine seedlings, rose bushes, hay bales or other plants that may cause minor skin breaks. In addition, it may be prudent to use pine seedling packing materials other than sphagnum moss, which has been implicated as a source of the fungus in a number of outbreaks.

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